

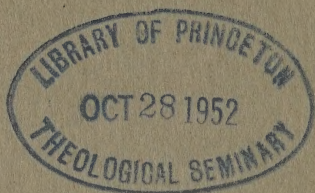
Richard G. Salomon

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Highlights of Church History  
Early & Medieval

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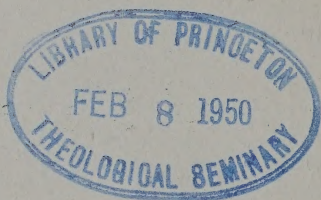
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# HIGHLIGHTS OF CHURCH HISTORY

Early & Medieval

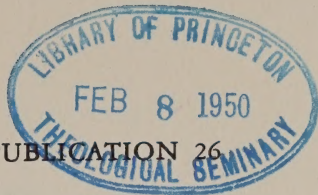
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CHURCH HISTORICAL SOCIETY PUBLICATION 26

# Highlights of Church History<sup>28</sup> Early & Medieval<sup>16</sup>



RICHARD G. SALOMON<sup>18</sup>

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## FOREWORD

**E**PISCOPALIANS KNOW frighteningly little about our historic Church and her claim to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The weakness of our Church is not so much a weakness of faith in practice as it is illiteracy—we know and read practically nothing about our faith, so how can we practice anything?

Certainly one program of the Church that should command more attention and a large place in parish programming is Adult Education.

Adult Education is fundamental, and its neglect over the years is the prime reason why Episcopalians (of course, they are not the *only* ones) know so little about their Church and their faith.

Schools of Religion are one answer to this problem of Adult Education. Schools of Religion are wonderful adventures for a parish or a group of parishes. For two years the Church of the Redeemer, Calvary Church, and the Church of the Ascension, of Pittsburgh, have held a School of Religion for Men. The men register for the school, pay tuition, and are expected to do collateral reading. A similar school has also been held for women.

The subjects of the lectures which were given at the 1947 School were selected by a committee of laymen. Church history was chosen as the subject for the first three lectures. Dr. Richard G. Salomon, Professor of Church History, Bexley Hall Divinity School, was

invited to give the first lecture. The period assigned was the first fifteen hundred years of the Church. A century every six minutes!

Professor Salomon gave a brilliant lecture. A rising ovation greeted his closing sentence, and immediately the men asked to have the lecture printed so that not only those present, but the Church at large might have this concise and scholarly presentation to study at their leisure. This publication is the result.


Frankly, I know of nothing else in print which gives the average layman such a readable historical background of the long life of the Church. In a very short compass of space, Professor Salomon has given a truly profound historical sketch. It is profound without being stuffy; historical, but not pedantic; sweeping, but not superficial. It is a remarkable job of "boiling down" without boiling away. I am happy to have played a small part in making this lecture available to the Church.

WILBURN C. CAMPBELL

*The Rectory*  
*Church of the Ascension*  
*Pittsburgh*  
*1948*



## PREFACE

 THE BRIEF SURVEY, which is presented in the following pages, was first published early in 1948, by request of the audience, as a special pamphlet under the editorship of the Reverend Wilburn C. Campbell, Rector of the Church of the Ascension, in Pittsburgh. Mr. Campbell and his Vestry were so kind as to surrender their rights, and thus enable the Church Historical Society to publish this edition, which can be offered to a larger circle of readers. For this edition I have made some minor changes, but have not tried to change the character of the text by deleting the traces of oral delivery.

RICHARD G. SALOMON

*Bexley Hall*  
*Kenyon College*  
*October 15, 1948*



**A**N AUDIENCE willing to listen to a presentation of Church history bears witness to the spirit which dominates the congregation. You would not have thought it worth while to show up for such an occasion if you were not conscious of the deep significance which historical continuity has in the life of the Church. A leading member of the English episcopate, himself a scholarly historian in his own right, has stated that this sense of historical continuity is "the true meaning of Apostolical Succession."

It is Church history that teaches us to see the Church of today in its right place. The Church does not forget; she carries the experience and the wisdom of the centuries on to future generations. What we see around us in Church life, from the outer form of the church building to the inner form of the service; the wording of the prayers and the contents of the hymnal; the ritual and duties of the ministry; their very titles, their position in the congregation—all this is the heritage of the past. But it is not heritage in the sense of an heirloom which must be carefully protected against any changes. The Church has never shunned a change in detail if sensible reasons dictated it. To be conscious of historical continuity does not mean being rigidly conservative and averse to progress. Acquaintance with history enables us to differentiate between essentials and non-essentials, to see our own Church life integrated into the great communion of Christian life in all centuries.



In the short time which is allowed to me, I cannot do more than show you some highlights and indicate some points which seem to me the most essential ones in the development of the Church.

### THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

Let me start with one of the most famous passages in the New Testament. In St. Matthew 16:18, Jesus says to St. Peter: "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."

This, as you know, is one of the three statements in the Gospels on which the Roman Catholic Church builds its claim of universal authority. I should neglect my professional duty if I passed over the fact that this passage is the subject of a long and unfinished controversy among theologians. There is not only a group of skeptics and agnostics, but one of truly Christian scholars who cannot convince themselves that this formula is a genuine, authentic statement of Jesus Christ. They consider it a literary formulation made by the author of the first gospel. It has been pointed out that hardly any word is more rare in the gospels than "church" (*ecclesia*)—in fact it appears only once more in all four of them (Matthew 18:17), and there in a somewhat different meaning.

We speak of Jesus as the founder of the Church. Among theologians there is a divergence of opinion as to how this is to be understood; because of the difference in the text of the gospels, not everyone will state with confidence that Jesus at the Last Supper meant to insti-

tute a rite for permanent celebration. But whatever the early history of the Eucharist may be, it is certain that the Holy Communion, the center of the Church's life, is rooted in the historical fact of the Last Supper. If in this broadest sense we consider Christ the founder of the Church, we do not mean to say that he was its organizer. He gave the Church its soul, not its body. "He laid down principles, but he drafted no rules." If we look at the last period of his life on earth and the period which followed his passion, we see that he and his followers lived in the immediate expectation of the Kingdom. This seemed to make provision for the future superfluous. The "primitive Church," the small community which had witnessed the passion, lived for some time in hope of his second coming and did not think of any organization which would enable them to exist as a community for any length of time.

It is not easy to say how long this period of intense expectation lasted, whether we have to put it in terms of months or years. The small company of one hundred and twenty disciples and followers (Acts 1:15) finally realized that the Kingdom tarried long, longer than original enthusiasm had hoped and expected. There was the Saviour's word: "My realm is not of this world," but the community of the believers was in this world; for an undefined time, as they realized. They had to live with this world and had to arrange for this life. It is in this way that the corporate life of the first Christian community began (Acts 2).

There is only a minimum of organization in this earli-

est Church. It was but natural that the Twelve had a place of authority, and James, our Lord's brother, a special position. But there was no organized clergy as yet. The first action in this direction is the ceremony in which the Seven were appointed to the *diakonia* (diaconate), to "serve tables" (Acts 6:2). Elected by the whole community and "set before the apostles," they were appointed with prayer and laying on of hands. This might perhaps be considered as the establishment of the order of deacons; further steps towards organization of a regular ministry are not reported for that time. If in later times St. James is occasionally called the first bishop of Jerusalem, we must be conscious that with this a later state of affairs is projected into the beginnings of the Church's history. The early Christian community of Jerusalem did not have a hierarchy of bishops and priests. Things changed when the mission began, when the gospel was preached to all people.

## RELIGIONS IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

In order to understand how it was possible that the religion of a small sect in a remote corner of the civilized world conquered the whole of this civilized world in a few centuries, we must consider the political situation. We have to dispense with our modern idea of the unity of the globe. The earth was divided into several "districts of civilization" which lived without knowing each other: regions like China, India and Central America.

The type of civilization which we now call classical, the Graeco-Roman root of our own culture, lived only



in the area all around the Mediterranean Sea, roughly the countries from France and Spain to Asia Minor and Syria. The whole area was politically unified in the Roman empire, living in peace as never before and never afterwards, under the reasonable regime of Roman law. There were no boundaries between the countries; men and goods and ideas had a free flow in all directions. The population was a mixture of peoples of various races and various levels of culture, with Greeks and Romans in the lead. Greek or Latin was spoken, or at least understood, all over the empire. The Roman government did not interfere with local traditions, customs and habits, nor with religions. Almost perfect religious tolerance was practiced. The old Egyptian Isis-Osiris religion continued to exist side by side with the Asiatic cult of the Great Mother; Jupiter, Apollo, Athene, had their temples; people transferring from one part of the empire to another carried their gods with them. The city of Rome was as full of religious bodies and sects as any great American city is today. True, the state claimed something from every subject which looked like a state religion but was not: the emperor's cult, which required occasional attendance at ceremonies in special temples in honor of the divine emperor from each citizen. Only the Jewish community was exempted from this requirement.

It would be wrong to consider the religious system of the Roman empire as nothing but superstitious heathenism. The educated class at least, long trained in philosophy, did not seek truth in the adoration of idols. They tolerated the traditional forms of religion, interpreted

as allegorical affirmations of a higher and hidden truth; they were aware of the existence of a God above the gods. Monotheism was not brought to them by the Christian mission as something perfectly new and surprising.

### CHRISTIANITY IN THE ROMAN WORLD

In a sense, then, the world was prepared for hearing the gospel. With the work of St. Paul, the Church took up the task. She crossed the boundaries of Palestine and faced the Roman world as a missionary institution. The "bearers of glad tidings" are known as apostles and prophets; we also hear about a class of missionaries called teachers. The unhampered communication between the various parts of the empire enabled them to carry on their activities, especially in the urban centres. Very early, as you know, we find them in the city of Rome itself, and equally early in other great cities like Corinth and Ephesus.

From the very outset we see public opinion, and, somewhat later, state authorities, opposed to their activities, denying to them the tolerance otherwise freely granted to every religious body. The doctrine itself did not interest the state. There was room for all types of religions in the empire, if they adapted themselves with slight concessions to the existing order. But this was what the new communion refused to do. They set themselves apart as the New Israel, as God's own people; they refrained from joining in customary public activities; they professed a religion of universal character, superior

to all others. So they did not fit into the traditional Roman system of national religions. A Roman writer of the first century sums up the public feeling against the new sect by accusing them of "hatred of mankind." They were suspect less because of misbelief than of disloyalty. Thus, the refusal of participation in the emperor's cult, which was tolerantly overlooked in the case of the Jews, became a crime if insisted on by Christians. Persecutions began before the end of the first century, and continued sporadically for over two hundred years; but the communities grew openly, and, in some cases, underground.

### ORGANIZED MINISTRY AND THE EPISCOPATE

It is in this period that we see the organization of the Church Universal coming into existence, the organization which is basically that of today. The community of Jerusalem had been led by the twelve Apostles. The missionary apostles and prophets traveled from place to place. Where they founded a new congregation, a permanent ministry was needed for administration of the sacraments, for preaching and teaching. In early times, shortly before 100 A.D., these permanent leaders appear under two different names, the "elders" and the "overseers," *presbyteroi* and *episkopoi*, priests, or presbyters, and bishops. The apostles of the first generation died; the prophets had done the pioneer work, and disappeared; the local leaders remained, and were, in case of death, replaced by elected successors who were ordained by laying on of hands.

Originally, we see in the individual communities a



plurality of such "elders and overseers." We cannot discuss the inner organization of these bodies, which still is the subject of scientific controversy. Not at the same time everywhere, but beginning about 100 A.D., the "monarchical" episcopate developed out of these bodies. The general tendency went towards concentration of leadership in the hands of one man. The "overseers," the "bishops," disappear, and are replaced by "the bishop." Long before the end of the second century each larger community in East and West had one bishop directing a group of priests. He was not only the high priest but the spiritual leader, the chief interpreter of the word, and soon the judge of his flock. In this sense he was the successor of the Twelve Apostles. No higher general organization existed as yet—there were local differences even in the formulation of the creed—but all the communities felt bound together by a faith, the same in all essentials, and by brotherly love. Contact between the communities was strong, though informal. The idea of the Church Universal was alive in all of them. It is shortly after 100 A. D., that we hear the name of the "Catholic Church" for the first time.

### ROME'S POSITION IN THE EARLY CHURCH

It is but natural that greater communities were more influential and respected, more listened to, than smaller ones; and authority voluntarily conceded for a long space of time will finally be claimed as a right. It is in this way that, since the end of the second century, Rome, the largest of all Christian communities, developed its claim as

the leading authority. The papacy was not founded as such; it grew slowly out of the natural position of the leader, the bishop of the great congregation in the capital city of the empire.

The question: "Who was the first pope?" will be answered in one and the same sense by all Roman Catholics: St. Peter. For us the answer is not so easy. We see a slow rise, step by step, of the Roman bishop to general recognition, a process which took two hundred years at least to achieve full perfection. Complete and acknowledged authority of the bishop of Rome over Western Christendom was not reached before the fifth century, before the time of Leo I, whose historic importance is stressed by his surname "the Great."

This process was not without contradiction. Here and there, now and then, local bishops opposed it; none of them more impressively than St. Cyprian of Carthage (about 250 A. D.), who, in a small book on *The Unity of the Church*, developed an episcopal system in which the Church Universal is represented by the communion of all bishops, among whom one bishop might perhaps have a primacy of honor but not of jurisdiction.

## THE PERSECUTIONS

The fact that controversies of this type were publicly discussed, indicates that the traditional picture of the Church in the first centuries, that picture of a permanently persecuted small community holding its services secretly in dark catacombs, cannot be quite correct. For the greater part of this time the Church lived in the

open, the number of believers grew apace, and the state authorities winked at the existence of the illegal organization. True, there were intermittent periods in which the state policy changed, and persecution was carried through in cruel forms, with intensity growing from one case to the other. Thus the third century (200-300 A. D.) became the classical time of the Christian martyrs, the heroes who died for the faith; St. Cyprian among them.

The history of these persecutions is not exclusively edifying. Side by side with the heroes, we see frail human beings who, in the moment of danger, abjured what they had believed and saved their lives by putting some grains of incense into the flame burning before the emperor's statue. The success of missionary work had brought people into the Church who were too commonplace to live up to the high-strung enthusiasm of the early age. If you wish to understand the religious psychology of that time, look at the modern parallel: the persecution of the Russian Church in the first years of the Bolshevist revolution. There you see a minority of martyrs, a number of turncoats or time-servers, and a body of believers who succeeded in getting through somehow, and remained strong enough to keep the Church alive.

The persecutions did not destroy the Church, not even the greatest, longest and most cruel of them, which was started by the Roman government about 300 A.D., and lasted for more than ten years. At the end, the Roman government realized that the slaughter was senseless, and capitulated before the fact that Christian faith was



too strong to be uprooted by brutal force. The Edict of Toleration issued by the Emperor Galerius in 311, and the so-called "Edict of Milan," issued in 313 by the Emperors Licinius and Constantine, stopped the persecution, allowed open worship, and restored all civil rights to the Christians. This is, generally seen, the most important turning point in the history of the Church.

### CONCILIATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

The names of Galerius and Licinius are forgotten today. Constantine "the Great" survives as the man who gave Christianity its status in the political world. He was not a Christian yet and his religious policy was not dictated by religious conviction. To him the Christian Church, irrepressibly growing, was a potential political ally. Personally, he kept a middle position between the old and the new religion. He did not give up his status as "Pontifex Maximus," highest priest of the old rites, but he took an active part in the affairs of the Church and called himself the "bishop for the outer affairs." He even showed up in services, but only among the catechumens, the candidates for baptism. Constantine received baptism only on his deathbed, but he extended favors to the Church all through his reign: by special laws the clergy were exempted from public burdens, and the Church was recognized as a corporation in public law, which gave her the right to acquire and to hold property.

In which direction the development was to go was clearly indicated by the fact that Constantine's successors to the throne became Christians themselves. As the

court goes, so goes society. In the relation between Christianity and paganism, the tables were turned. The laws in favor of the Church were soon accompanied by restrictive orders against pagan practices, and these orders became stricter from decade to decade. The last decisive steps followed at the end of Constantine's century: in 380 a law of Emperor Theodosius I ordered all subjects of the empire to accept the Catholic Christian faith, "that faith which Bishop Damasus (of Rome) and Bishop Peter of Alexandria follow," and threatened punishment for all heretical deviations. Twelve years later, this law was supplemented by another one which put all pagan practices under severe penalty.

The Church had conquered; the victory was politically complete: Christianity was the religion, the only religion, of the Roman state. Theodosius, the founder of what we might call the Established Church in the empire, survives in Christian memory as "the Great," like Constantine.

A law regulating, or trying to regulate, the religious belief of people, is easier published than enforced. The acts of 380 and 392 did not, of course, change the religious situation from one day to the other. Pagan religion, doomed as it was, was slow to die; its last remainders still existed in remote corners of the land a hundred years after Theodosius.

A Christian in this time must have felt triumphant. The question remains, however, whether this victory was an unmixed blessing for the Church. There was official recognition, there was an honored position, there was

power for the Church—but inevitably there was now room for greed and for rivalry and ambition. The conciliation between Church and state, the alliance between them for mutual sponsorship, was not to be had without a price. In the age of persecution the Church had been in permanent danger but morally free. In the new situation the state claimed the lion's share—decisive influence and supremacy over the Church.

The situation is characterized by the fact that the first general council of the Church, which met very soon after Constantine's decree, the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.), was convened not by ecclesiastical but by state authority. The emperor or his commissaries presided over the assembly which discussed questions of faith and Church discipline. Religious questions looked peculiar under this constellation. The theological problem of Nicaea was the definition of the Trinity, particularly the Person of Christ—but the state was not interested in which one of the formulas offered in the discussion was adopted. Constantine was not seeking for religious truth, but for ecclesiastical unity, elimination of conflicts within the Church. To him the Church was a political instrument to keep the peace. For the first time we see politics interfering with religion. And so it remained for centuries: not only the Council of Nicaea, but also the other universal councils, like Ephesus and Chalcedon, were gathered by imperial command, under the authority of the emperor. Their decisions were submitted to him for approval and confirmation.

And worse than that: politics pressed on the Church

not only from the outside; politics disrupted the inner life of the Church. Once the Church had become a power in public life, rivalry for the first place within the Church was unavoidable. In the great dogmatic controversies of the fifth century (400-500 A.D.), in the struggle about the Person of Christ, it is not difficult to detect the jealousy of the leading members of the hierarchy. Very often the dogmatic problem is but a cover for the rivalry, the competition for power, between the great bishops of Alexandria and Constantinople, or Rome and Constantinople.

We, living in a country where Church and state are separated to their mutual advantage, can not so easily realize what sinister consequences this early "establishment" of the Church in the Roman empire entailed. Walter von der Vogelweide, a medieval German poet, had the right feeling when he said that in the moment when Constantine endowed the Church with power, an angel in heaven cried out: "Now poison has been poured into the body of the Church."

The conciliation of Church and state caused the most lasting problem of Church life, a problem on which people have worked and struggled ever since: the just relationship of the two powers, each of which claimed sovereign authority. The struggle has been carried on in changing forms, according to the temperament of the centuries, sometimes in brutal fight, sometimes in polite discussion, and it has not ended yet in some countries. The ideal solution of a clear cleavage between the fields of action of Church and state was never reached in the



Middle Ages. There were periods of cooperation, but even then an uneasy feeling remained, a temptation on each side to encroach on the other.

“There are two things, august Emperor,” Pope Gelasius wrote to the emperor in 494, “by which this world is chiefly ruled, the sacred authority of the priests and the royal power. Of these, that of the priests is the more weighty, since they have to give reckoning even for the kings in the divine judgment. You also know, most gracious son, that though you rule in dignity over mankind, you bow your head devoutly before the high administrators of things divine and await from them the means of your salvation. You understand that in the reception of the heavenly sacraments you must be subordinate rather than superior to the clergy.”

At that time this was only a theoretical claim, which the pope had no means of enforcing; but the idea remained alive and was taken up time and again during eight hundred years.

## DIVISION OF THE CHURCH

To a certain extent the development of the Church followed the way of the state. The established Church in the Roman empire was a unit like the empire itself, a Catholic, i.e. universal Church. At the end of the fourth century the empire split in two: an Eastern half, predominantly Greek, with Constantinople as its capital; and a Western, Latin one, with Rome. The histories of the two halves are very different: the Eastern, or Byzantine, empire lived on for a thousand years more,

though with shrinking area and sinking strength, until the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453. The West soon fell a victim to the Teutonic invaders, who made an end to the rule of emperors in the West (476), and founded their national states, France, Spain, England, on the territory of the Western empire.

And the Church followed, although slowly and reluctantly. Like the state, she split into two halves: the Greek Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. We are usually told that nothing is between us and our Eastern brothers but a slight difference in the wording of the Nicene Creed. Historically, this is not correct. What caused the separation is not a special dogmatic question. It is, besides political conflicts, a difference in approach to religion in general between East and West, which came into the open as soon as the unifying bond of the empire was broken.

The East, influenced by the speculative philosophy of Greece as well as by oriental mysticism and quietism, confronted the more active spirit of the Latin West. They developed two different types of Church life. The Eastern Church is much more conservative, devoted to antiquity just because it is antiquity. Since the time when John of Damascus codified Greek dogmatics in his *Fountainhead of Knowledge* (about 750), the Christian East has not seen any theological development comparable to that of the West.

The Western Church lived less placidly but more productively; dogmatic differences kept her in permanent motion. The Western Church produced new formula-

tions of the dogma and produced heresies, which was not altogether a bad thing, for they acted as stimulants for religious thought. And the West gave birth to the Reformation. The Greek Church has never seen the like.

There is a peculiarly passive trend in the Greek Church. She never was strong enough to overcome the predominant influence of the worldly power. In the Eastern empire as well as in Russia, which after the fall of Constantinople became the greatest Orthodox power, the Church always subordinated herself to imperial authority. The patriarch of Constantinople never was an Eastern pope; he remained forever what he had been in the beginning: the court bishop of the Eastern emperor, appointed, and very often deposed, by the emperor.

The split between East and West began early: about 500, the bishops of Rome and Constantinople excommunicated one another, and this first schism lasted for over thirty years. It was healed, somehow; but three hundred years later it broke out again, and proved practically incurable. A wall of mutual mistrust and prejudice rose between the two Churches: the stronger, the less they knew one another. Their ways separated. Both of them expanded their area by mission: Rome christianized the Western World—France, England, Germany, Poland; the East became the missionary field of Constantinople—the Balkans and, more important, Russia.

The fact is more essential than we might realize at first glance. Today we hear so much complaint about the impossibility of an understanding between us and the Russians. It is a little cheap to bring this down to the

simple formula of Capitalism versus Communism. The discrepancy is much older: it goes back to the thousand years' old religious and psychological conflict between East and West. Our civilization has been deeply influenced by the Western Church; the Russians were educated in the school of Eastern Christianity, and however much modern Russian official atheism disclaims religion, the marks of this education show in their political dogmatism.

### MONASTICISM

These few hints must be enough for a consideration of the East. Before we turn to the West, we must consider in a short survey the development of a special branch of Church life which is indispensable to the understanding of the later development.

The great mass of Christians in East and West lived in secular professions, in trade and agriculture, in gainful occupation, as we do. But there was, as there is today, a minority of pious souls who wanted to dedicate the whole of their lives to devotion and prayer, who felt unable to make their peace with the noisy world, and who were eager to find a form of existence which would allow them the quiet needed for permanent and uninterrupted meditation and preparation for the life to come. It is in this way that the institution of monasticism came into existence.

A "monk" is, if we interpret the Greek word, a man who "is alone"; the related names of "anchorite" and "hermit" mean men who have "retired" from the world,



or who "live in the desert." The original history of the institution is indicated in this terminology. All three words are Greek.

It was in the Greek half of the Church that monasticism arose, that the first monasteries were founded. Monastic organization started in Egypt in the late third century, and was copied in other parts of the East. A Greek Church Father, St. Basil, formulated the rule under which Eastern monks and monasteries have lived ever since.

From the East the movement spread to the Western countries; settlements of monastic character came into existence, bound by various codes of house discipline. It was one of the great organizing geniuses of the Church, St. Benedict (d. 543), who founded the monastery on the mountain halfway between Rome and Naples, which became the model for all monastic institutions in the West—Monte Cassino. He wrote the famous little book of regulations for his house, the "Rule," which still is the basic code of the Benedictine order and which also served as a pattern for rules of other orders.

It is well known what the Benedictines did for scholarship and education in the early Middle Ages, when the lay world was almost entirely illiterate. It was their industry which conserved priceless treasures of ancient literature for later ages. But if you read the rule, you will not find anything in it about scholarly work. St. Benedict, not a learned man himself—his biographer stresses how he remained "wisely ignorant"—prescribed

a life of prayer and handiwork for his monks; the scholarly endeavors were introduced by the next generation only.

In the tumultuous times of the early Middle Ages, the monasteries gained great importance: two hundred years after St. Benedict's death there were thousands of them spread over all of Western Europe. It was a group of Benedictine monks which, under the lead of St. Augustine (d. 604), revived the Christian faith in England. As places of refuge for seriously religious people, as centers of study, as strongholds of the Church, the monasteries served a useful purpose. They were not able, however, to exclude the less desirable element, idlers who preferred the comparatively undisturbed life of the monastic community to work in the outside world, and thus spoiled the idealistic setup of the founder. The history of the monastery is a history of degeneration and reform in unending change. From century to century we find serious spirits bent on re-establishing the original purity of life under the four vows of St. Benedict: poverty, chastity, obedience, stability. We shall hear more about it.

### RISE OF THE PAPACY

Now let us turn to the development of the Church in the West. The Western empire was destroyed, but Rome, the Eternal City, remained and rose again to be, in a new sense, the capital of the Western world. How did it happen that the bishop of Rome became the spiritual head of the Western world?

We have already mentioned the growing preponder-

ance of the Roman bishop in early centuries. It was not based on political power; and it was not equal at all times. In the turbulent three centuries which followed the end of the Western empire, from about 500 to 800 A.D., there were long periods in which the bishop of Rome played only a modest part. Politically, he was not a sovereign; he was a subject of the Eastern emperor, who kept his grip on the city of Rome even in a time when the greater part of Italy was lost to him. Even a great pope like Gregory the Great, the same who sent St. Augustine to christianize England, did not escape the formality of being confirmed in his office by the Eastern emperor. It was only in the eighth century that two successive popes, Gregory II and Gregory III, broke this Eastern yoke. They took the lead in a revolution which made an end to the control of Rome by Constantinople.

This liberation brought the Roman Church, the pope and the city of Rome into a peculiar situation. In getting rid of the overlord in the East, they also lost the political protection of his power and were left in a dangerous position. The bishop of Rome had neither territory nor means of defense.

Italy was in its larger part occupied by Teutonic invaders, the Lombards. They made raids against the Eternal City, and help from the outside was urgently needed in order to resist. Politically weak, the pope had to look out for the assistance of another power, itself opposed to his Lombard enemies. He found an ally and helper in the person of the king of the Franks, the strongest of the Teutonic tribes established in the area of the former

empire. They dominated the whole of what is now France and a large part of Germany. By a game of give and take between the Franks and the pope, an alliance was created which was henceforth to direct and to dominate the development of Church and Christendom in Western Europe.

It was a Frankish king who gave the territory around Rome to the pope, thus laying the foundation for the Papal States; and it was a pope who put the imperial crown on the head of Charlemagne (800 A.D.), renewing the old empire. Charlemagne and his successors became protectors of the papal see, and they asked a price for it. Very much like the Eastern emperors, they controlled the Church: against the rules of canon law they appointed the bishops, and so did the kings of France and England. From 800 to about 1050 the secular power prevailed in the rivalry between Church and state.

### CLUNIAC REFORM

The inner life of the Church in this period is not attractive. Some figures of saintly men, like St. Dunstan in England, stand out in solitary greatness. The general impression is that of decay and lessening of energy. But in the tenth century a new reform movement started from an obscure monastery in France: Cluny. I have already mentioned the recurrent trends towards reform in monastic life. At Cluny a small group of idealists worked on a purification of monastic life, and, within some generations, they won a large part of the Christian world for their ideas. Far beyond the problems



of monastic life, the Cluny movement grew into a fight for freedom of the Church, freedom from corruption and secular control, and for the re-establishment of the dignity of the Church. To the "Cluniacs" the Church was indeed meant to be the City of God on earth.

This Cluniac idealism won adherents even among the secular rulers. The decisive moment came when a man of Cluniac convictions became emperor: Henry III. He was not willing to go the whole way and did not think of giving up the imperial authority over the Church; but he meant indeed to purify the Church. In 1046 Henry III made an end to a most undignified struggle between no less than three men who claimed to be pope: he deposed all of them and appointed a man of his own school to the papacy.

A few years later the emperor died; his successor was a child, not to be reckoned with. Now the holy see saw the moment for action. In 1059 Pope Nicholas II issued the decree by which all secular influence was excluded from the election of the popes, which henceforth was to be made by the college of cardinals alone. Now the Church was ready to fight back against the state, and the conflict reached its most dramatic stage.

### PAPAL SUPREMACY

It was Nicholas's second successor, Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085), who claimed not only independence of the Church, but supremacy of the pontiff over the kings. By dint of his authority, as the successor of St. Peter, he forbade the appointment to ecclesiastical offices by

worldly rulers. We have a document of his in which he drafted his opinion about the nature of his power. Let me quote some of his statements:

“The Roman pope alone may depose bishops or reinstate them.

He alone may use the insignia of empire.

He may depose emperors.

No council may be called general without his consent.

A decree of his may be annulled by no one; he alone may annul the decrees of all.

The Roman Church has never erred nor ever shall err to all eternity, as Holy Scripture testifies.”

It is not possible to surpass this. But let us not make the mistake of believing that here speaks an overbearing dictator for himself. Gregory formulated only what a century of reform ideas had led to. Being deeply religious, deeply conscious of the holy burden of his office, he was convinced that he was expressing, not his personal ambition, but the immortal dignity of his office.

This papal imperialism did not remain on paper only; it entered the field of practical politics and caused a furious ten years' long fight between the pope and the young emperor, with mutual deposition, with acts of humiliation, reconciliation and new hostility, and a tragic end for Gregory. Driven from Rome by the emperor's army, he died in exile.

But his ideas did not die with him. His successors struggled for them with varying results. We might say

that all this has little to do with religion, that Jesus would have abhorred this Church which was fighting for political power; but we might also try to see this exciting spectacle through the eyes of a medieval churchman. It would be wrong to paint a picture in black and white—on one side, a power-drunken head of the Church; on the other side, a king defending natural rights. The popes, at least the best among them, acted in good faith, conscious of their responsibility for a just order in this world and the salvation of mankind in the world to come. They were sincere in their belief in their divine mission.

On a smaller scale you have the same thing in a well-known chapter of English Church history: in the struggle of Thomas Becket with King Henry II. The “murder in the cathedral” made Thomas a saint, but it will be worth while to ask for what he died. He was not a martyr in the sense of the heroes of old, who gave their lives for the faith. There was no controversy about religion between the archbishop and the king. The struggle centered around the same problem which Gregory had tackled: the relation of Church and state. Like Gregory, Thomas fought for ecclesiastical power, for freedom of the Church from secular influence; the triumph which he won for the Church through his death was a political victory.

In a general way—we must skip some temporary setbacks—the line of papal omnipotence still went upward and reached its culmination point about 1200 A.D., under the pontificate of Innocent III, the most success-

ful, if not the greatest, among all popes. Under him we see the idea of a papal world empire materialized to a large extent. He decided who should rule over Germany; with one hint he frightened the king of France into obedience; King John of England surrendered his country to Innocent and received it back as papal fief, so that nominally the pope would be the political overlord of England. The nation disapproved of the action of the king, but nevertheless a payment, not very high but high enough, was made every year by the English crown to the pope in recognition of the oath of fealty which John had sworn.

### DECLINE OF THE PAPACY

Innocent's successors were not able to hold the splendid heights which he had reached. In fighting against secular power they scored some triumphs, but new powers were arising, secular states better organized than the old ones.

It was France especially that took the lead in fighting the papal claims. Almost exactly with the end of the thirteenth century, the tide turned. There is the tragic figure of Pope Boniface VIII, a man high in his eighties, but still glowing with the belief in the God-willed papal domination of the world. He provoked a conflict with France, challenging the king over a question of Church taxes—a comparatively unimportant business affair, which, however, developed into a struggle of principles. In a grandiose manifesto the pope summed up, for the last time, the ideas which had filled the mind of Gregory



VII and Innocent III. This is the famous bull, *Unam Sanctam*, of 1302:

"We are obliged by the faith to believe and hold—and we do firmly believe and sincerely confess—that there is one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, outside of which there is neither salvation nor remission of sins. . . . Of this one and only Church there is one body and one head—not two heads, like a monster—namely Christ, and Christ's vicar is Peter, and Peter's successor, for the Lord said to Peter himself, 'Feed my sheep.' 'My sheep' He said in general, not these or those sheep; wherefore He is understood to have committed them all to him. Therefore, if the Greeks\* or others say that they were not committed to Peter and his successors, they must necessarily confess that they are not of Christ's sheep, for the Lord says in John, 'There is one fold and one Shepherd.'†

"And we learn from the words of the Gospel that in this Church and in her power are two swords, the spiritual and the temporal. . . . Both are in the power of the Church, the spiritual sword and the material. But the latter is to be used for the Church, the former by her; the former by the hand of the priest, the latter by that of kings and captains but at the will and by the permission of the priest. The one sword, then, should be under the other, and temporal authority subject to spiritual. Spiritual power excels in dignity and nobility any earthly power. . . . Spiritual power shall ac-

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\* A reference to the Greek and other Eastern Orthodox Christians, who rejected the papal claims.

† The text follows the wording of the official Bible text of the Middle Ages, the Latin Vulgate, which renders the original Greek (John 10,16: there is one *flock* and one shepherd) inexactly.

according to Holy Scripture establish earthly power and judge it, if it be not good. Thus, concerning the Church and ecclesiastical power, is the prophecy of Jeremiah (1:10) fulfilled, "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms,' etc. If, therefore, the earthly power err, it shall be judged by the spiritual power; and if a lesser spiritual power err, it shall be judged by a greater. But if the supreme power err, it can only be judged by God, not by man. . . . Whoever therefore resists this power thus ordained of God, resists the ordinance of God. . . . Furthermore we declare, state, define and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman pontiff."

This is the swan-song of papal omnipotence. You will realize how near the claim formulated in this document of 1302 is to that statement made by Pope Gelasius eight hundred years before. What then had been theory only, but reality under Innocent III, was now ended with one sudden blow. The king of France took action. A group of French agents went to the pope's residence and arrested him. Raging with indignation at this unheard-of insult, the old man died a few days later; and the king managed to have a reliable Frenchman, Clement V, elected pope. A few years later the papacy was forced by the French king to transfer its residence from Rome over the Alps, and for two-thirds of the fourteenth century (1309-1376) the popes resided at Avignon in Provence, not in French territory proper but near enough to be permanently controlled by France. The French crown saw to it that none other than a Frenchman was

elected to the papacy. The college of cardinals also became French by an overwhelming majority. The dream of world power was ended; for this period the papacy became an agency of French politics.

This does not mean that these French popes had no influence on the inner life of the Church. On the contrary, their grip over bishops and archbishops and monastic orders grew stronger. The Avignon popes are notorious for very sharp fiscal policy. They taxed the Church everywhere—one of the reasons for growing unrest and protest in Christendom, even among the clergy.

### NEW FORMS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

And there were other causes for unrest. The inner life, the religious life of Christendom, had changed considerably since the days of Innocent III. New trends are seen. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were full of glowing religiosity, of morbid expectations of the end of the world, of heresies, an age of religious excitement and prophecy. The greatest event of this period is the appearance of a new type of monasticism: the mendicant orders, created by St. Francis and St. Dominic. The mendicants were not to retire into solitude like the old monks, to concentrate there on choir prayer, meditation and scholarly work. They were to live in the world, to be transferred at the command of their superiors from one place to another, to live just in those places which the old orders avoided—in the cities; not to keep aloof from publicans and sinners, but to influence them by kindness and by preaching the word of God.

It was this second task which the Dominicans, the "order of the preachers," considered the most important. They were founded as a special organization for defending the purity of doctrine and for fighting against heresies. The order gave its members an excellent theological and scientific education. They came to replace the old Benedictines in the leadership of scholarly studies. The most influential of the thirteenth-century scholars, like Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, were Dominicans. But the order never gained popularity. Trained for the combat against false doctrine, Dominicans were preferred for the service on the dreaded tribunals which tried heretics and heresy suspects, the courts of the Inquisition.

The Franciscans, on the other hand, were the "irregulars" of the Church's army. They did not fit easily into the existing organization. Their high-strung idealism even brought them into serious conflicts with the papacy. The Franciscan order grew quicker than any other had done. Being the poor man's helpers and friends, they reached an unparalleled popularity, and acted, at least in their first generations, as a ferment of religious thought in wide circles of Christendom. They were, however, not exempt from that general law of decay which we have seen at work in older monastic organizations. One hundred and fifty years after the death of their founder, many Franciscans were far from the original purity, and had become a rather materialistic and parasitic lot, as Chaucer most impressively describes them in the *Canterbury Tales*.

## ANTI-ROMAN TRENDS

Clerical behavior challenged the criticism of the lay world, and criticism raised its head everywhere. The popes of Avignon did not command the respect of the nations as the great popes of the past had done. In 1325 an Italian scholar, Marsiglio of Padua, published a book under the title of *Defender of the Peace*, the first massive attack against the worldly interests of the Church, and against papalism. The idea it developed was a clear cleavage between Church and state, with the Church as the organization of things spiritual only, and shorn of any influence in politics. For the institution of the papacy he had not one good word. With a great amount of historical scholarship he tried to prove that the theory of a special privilege for St. Peter and his successors had no foundation at all.

It goes without saying that at Avignon all this was considered rank heresy. There is no lack of pamphlets written on the other side, fighting for the old papal theory.

But those were evil times for the papal system, and the literary attacks were not the worst that were to come. In 1351 England went into open action. Two laws, issued by Parliament in 1351 and 1353, forbade any outside power, i.e., the papacy, to appoint anybody to a living in England, and forbade any English subject to appeal from English courts to an outside, i.e. papal, tribunal. In 1366, another decision of Parliament made an end to the payment of feudal dues to the pope, which King John had guaranteed.



About the same time John Wycliff (c. 1320-1384), an Oxford doctor of theology, launched his first literary attacks against the existing system of papal administration and its misuses, attacks which in a few years broadened out into bolder ones against the foundations of Roman theology. Wycliff is the forerunner of the Protestant Reformation.

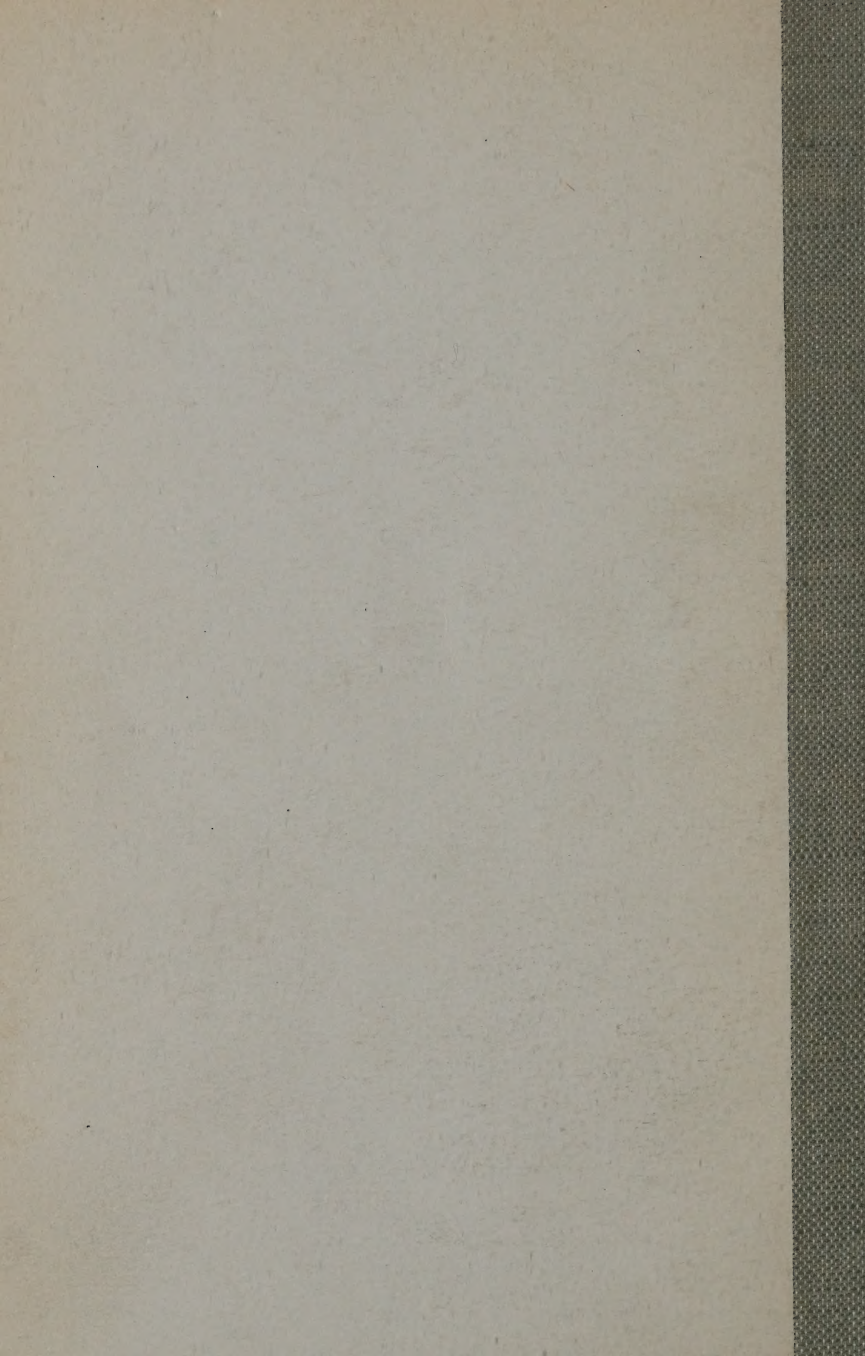
On the continent Wycliff's ideas were propagated by John Hus, who became one of the early martyrs of the Reformation. He was burned at the stake at Constance in 1415. One hundred years later Martin Luther discovered with surprise how many of his own ideas had already been preached by John Hus. But he did not know how far Hus depended on the doctrines of John Wycliff.

The movement started by Wycliff did not reach its aim. It was crushed with the help of state power. In the following generations we see tendencies towards a general reform of the Church by means of changes in her constitution. The councils of Constance (1414-1417) and Basel (1431-1449) tried to replace papal absolutism by a constitutional monarchy in the Church, with the general council as the highest authority, even above the pope. This movement, too, ended in failure. Once more the papacy triumphed and maintained the traditional form of Church government. But it was a brief respite. Half a century later the storm broke loose: the Reformation succeeded where the earlier attempts had failed, at the price of breaking the unity of the medieval form of the *Una Sancta*, the One Holy Church.







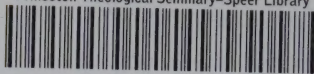






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